

A Mole Calls the



by Lt. Norm Presecan

So there I was, a first tour NFO with two Persian Gulf deployments under my belt, a mission-commander qual, more than 900 E-2C hours, two different aircraft carriers, and a gritty layer of salt becoming visible on my shoulder. There wasn't much I hadn't seen or done (that could be done) in my two and a half years as a fleet mole.

My pilot that night was a nugget. He still had that new pilot smell. Tonight would be his first non-CQ hop in the fleet. I wasn't worried, because he'd done extremely well during CQ at the FRS and with us. The CAPC sitting in the right seat was a seasoned veteran, a lieutenant commander with a bunch of hours and a genuine fear of death. He was the perfect choice to show the new guy the ropes.

I would be sitting in the RO seat. The CICO, who was flying his first hop from the ship since getting his mission-commander qual, was in the ACO seat. My squadron had just gotten underway from Guam, after a successful SFARP det and a

few days off. Carrier quals had gone smoothly, and we were all looking forward to some good flying and some great WestPac ports during this two-month deployment.

The hop was standard; a double cycle with a night launch and recovery. The mission was AEW and some OPFOR control, nothing too strenuous for the first day out. During the brief, we quickly discussed some of the ORM issues pertaining to the flight, specifically, the new CICO. Satisfied that we had all the bases covered, I was sure this would be a boring flight.

Things started to get interesting immediately after launch. As we climbed to 1,000 feet for the Case III departure, the pilot started wondering aloud why no one was talking to him. After a few seconds of confusion, our intrepid CAPC reverted to the "original" ICS—shouting. He soon managed to get the pilot to select radio 6 (which had our tac freq entered) and began talking to him on the radio. He had his hands full talking to departure and Red Crown. There wasn't much we could do to help in the back, short of calling traffic and backing up the



radios. Things settled down, and we proceeded to station to figure things out.

On station, the pilots swapped seats, and the CAPC began to troubleshoot the ICS box. In order to get at it, he had to remove a cover on the instrument panel. He proceeded to re-seat the connectors on the box and replaced it. In the process, however, one of the fasteners skittered away. Despite an extensive search, the CAPC couldn't find it. On the plus side, the impromptu maintenance seemed to do the trick, and full ICS function was restored to the cockpit. Since we were flying the last event of the day for this aircraft, there would be plenty of time to do a FOD search after we landed. The pilots returned to their original seats, so that our nugget could get his night trap.

Liberty 601 headed into the marshal stack. I listened in as the CAPC explained the finer details of fuel and time management in the marshal stack. We'd timed it perfectly, commencing on time.

CP (radio #1): "Marshal, Liberty 601, commencing."

CP (ICS): "OK, you're heading is 280."

Pilot (ICS): "I can't hear you..."

Of all the silly times for the ICS to quit again! We were spring-loaded in the tube this time, and tac was up in radio No. 2 before the CAPC had to ask for it. We proceeded inbound and attempted some limited troubleshooting but quickly decided to concentrate on getting the beast on deck. The CAPC continued to make all radio calls while talking to the pilot, but soon he became overloaded with comms. He shed the approach radio to the CICO. The CICO, realizing that he would soon be unable to use the foot switch because of the stowed ditching hatch (since he was sitting in the ACO seat), immediately gave that job to the RO—me!

Now, I've been talking on the radio for years, but this was different. In the back of the E-2, there is no direct flight-control input, and we have no needles. I had to coordinate with the CAPC so I didn't sound stupid. Fortunately, most of my lines were easy: "601" or "roger."


We decided that I should call the ball so the copilot could concentrate on talking our new pilot down (switching radios at three-quarters of a mile isn't a great idea). Ironically, I had been talking to the MO earlier that day about calling the ball as a mole. He'd never done it. Now I had my chance.

"601, three-quarters of a mile, call the ball."

"601, Hawkeye Ball, 4.0."

We caught a 3-wire, and our nugget even got the lights off before the end of the rollout.

Crew coordination had been a critical factor from start to finish. Front-to-back coordination in the E-2 can be tricky sometimes, since the aircrew members are separated by about 20 feet of radar and equipment boxes. Everyone in the crew had great SA throughout the flight, and this was vital to the smooth transition from routine to abnormal operations.

What about our decision-making? Was it smart to leave a brand new pilot in the left seat with a faulty ICS? We assumed that the ICS problem was fixed, and for most of the flight it worked, but it quit at exactly the worst time. Amazingly, we lost pilot ICS at the two most critical moments of flight. Good crew coordination and flexibility allowed us to handle this minor emergency effectively, without becoming so wrapped up in it that we forgot to aviate. 

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